

# TOWING & RECOVERY FOOTNOTES

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EXPORTS  
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May 2007

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## HOME, HOME ON THE ROAD

*Luxury RVs are big, boxy and really bothersome to tow*

By Allan T. Duffin

On a bright sunny day several years ago, a retired husband and wife were driving their luxury coach -- a Winnebago Vectra they had purchased just two weeks before -- on an open stretch of westbound I-90 in northwest Washington. They were towing a tiny Suzuki Samurai behind their motor home.

Tired from the long drive, the husband dozed off behind the wheel. The huge 17-ton vehicle veered onto the center median strip and struck a row of fiberglass reflective posts. The shot-

gun-like sounds of shattering fiberglass immediately woke up the husband, who panicked and jerked the steering wheel to the right.

When the motor home started to fishtail, he over-steered in the opposite direction and the right rear tire rolled off its bead. The aluminum wheel caught the pavement and the motor home pitched on its side. The enormous vehicle slid down the asphalt as the Samurai behind it turned upside down and whipsawed back and forth. The two vehicles gradually skidded to a halt in the middle of the freeway.

Call them what you will -- coaches, campers, caravans, motor homes, recreational vehicles (RVs) -- these gigantic homes-on-wheels are the ultimate in mobile luxury. But when one of these big vehicles breaks down or is involved in an accident, the luxury coach becomes a huge challenge for the tow operator. Many luxury coaches are built on truck chassis, but recovering an RV is nothing like recovering a truck.

### High, Heavy & Hard

The high value and heavy weight of many coaches requires a tow operator with special experience and a high risk threshold. Consequently, many tow operators understandably shy away from working with luxury coaches. "They can be a pain to load or tow," said Al Gregg of Dakota Service and Repair in Brookings, SD.

The challenge can be daunting, agreed "Stormin' Norman" Stenberg, a 15-year towing industry veteran in



A motor coach ready to haul by Bill and Wag's Towing in Los Angeles

Entiat, WA, 90 miles east of Seattle. "Ninety percent of the time you get out there and it's 'Hmm ... How are we going to do this?'" he said. "That's scary when you're looking at a motor home worth \$500,000 to \$1 million."

So what makes the luxury coach a tough job to tackle? "It's the way they're built," said Stenberg. Gregg added, "Most of these coaches are 'pushers' [rear wheel drive with dead axles to bear the load] which have short little shafts in the rear." In the past, tow operators could pick up a motor home using the frame or a cross-member, but today's air suspension and airbag systems create serious clearance issues, requiring the tower to reach deep underneath the vehicle to find a hook-up spot.

Difficult-to-remove drivelines and axle covers, along with inconveniently located leveling jacks, can create additional difficulties for the tower. "You need extra-long equipment to do it," said Stenberg, who typically uses a two-stage wheel lift in his recovery operations. "We move a lot of RVs on Landoll-type trailers or with heavy-duty tow units using an L-arm type of lift with wheel-lift grids," said Bill Robertson, founder of Bill and Wag's Towing in Los Angeles.

For tow operators, "it all gets down to 'Is the risk worth the amount of return?'" said Robertson, who noted that many RV owners have tow coverage through a motor club or other membership association. The organi-

zations sponsoring these programs are constantly searching for vendors who will charge lower rates, he said, "but tow companies often refuse to tow these fragile, expensive units while charging automobile or even tractor-trailer rates."

### Experience Required

Success or failure in recovering luxury coaches is ultimately dependent on the skill and experience of the tow operator. "Even with all the equipment you can get," said Robertson, "you need a very good operator with experience and good common sense."

As with other vehicles, technological and stylistic changes in the last several decades have made the job of towing a luxury coach much more difficult. Many modern motor homes dispense with the traditional straight axle in favor of an independent front suspension. Today's coaches also have titanium A-arm suspensions, electrically operated steps, and low-mounted exhaust systems, to name a few modern features.

The other end of the tow job -- pulling the vehicle into its destination -- presents problems as well. Robertson noted that towing onto driveways can be a difficult task with a luxury coach, as the massive weight and low underbody clearance can scrape the vehicle along the ground on both the front and rear ends.



Bill Robertson, founder of Bill and Wag's Towing, double-checks the lift

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Stock#401717, 215 hp Duramax, automatic transmission, 25,950# GVW, spring suspension, Century 21' steel carrier, aluminum overlay solid rail, 8,000# winch, cable roller guide, remote winch free spool.



**2007 335 PETERBILT**

Stock# 696572, 315hp cummins, 10 speed trans, 2- 57 gal alum fuel tanks, air ride suspension  
**Century Model 5130**, serial# 5130-0358-i06, 25 ton boom, 2-25,000lb winches, alum body, air winch free spools



**1995 IH 9370**

Stock# 013773 - 425hp 3406 cat - 13 speed trans - 48" sleeper - air ride suspension, 2000 jerr dan 500 280 - 25 ton boom - 2-25,000lb winches - whelen strobe light bar - 3 stage underlift - wired remote.



**1991 FREIGHTLINER FL112**

Stock# 472478 - 12.7 detroit 400hp - 15 speed trans - 379,000 miles - air conditioning 1993 vulcan v-60 - serial# 930000173 - 30 ton boom - 2-30k planetary winches - amber light bar - 3 stage underlift.



**2006 FORD F550 4X4**

Stock# d52260 - 6.0 diesel - 6 speed trans - power windows - power locks vulcan model 882 - serial# 882-02571-e06 - 8 ton recovery boom - 2-8,000lb winches - stainless steel body - 24" tunnel tool box.



**2005 IH 4300**

Stock#138181 - v8 diesel - automatic trans - 79,000 miles - alum wheels jerr dan 12 ton - 12 ton boom - 2-12,000lb winches - 2-24" alum tunnel boxes - med duty truck hitch - 60" ca alum body.



**1984 FORD L SERIES**

Stock# a41429 - 210hp 3208 cat - 10 speed trans - air brakes - odometer shows 214,000 century model 820 - 2 20,000lb winches - 20 ton boom - serial# l-0236-g82 - hydraulic rear spades - upper floods.

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**1995 CHEVY C7500**

Stock#100676 - 3116 cat engine - 10 speed trans - 30,100 gvw - air brakes nomar 9513 - serial# r74954 - 14 ton boom - 2-14k winches - 1280 underlift 3 stage - 12 axle forks.



**2003 FORD F550**

stock# d38874 - 6.0 power stroke - 6 speed trans - 19,000lb gvw - 65,000 miles, century 412 - 8 ton boom - 2-8,000lb winches - 24" tunnel box - swivel l-arms - car sling.



**2000 CHEVY 3500 2WD**

Stock# 414196 - 350 v8 gas - automatic trans - 101,000 miles - power windows, century 211 - 8,000lb winch - steel light pylon - mx 7000 light bar - chrome hand rails - lower work lights.



**1999 FORD F450**

Stock# d76579 - v10 gas engine - automatic trans - power windows - power locks, holmes 440-1 - serial# 198 ita 1163 - 8 ton boom - 1 8,000lb winch - code 3 mx 7000 light bar - 2 insert tool boxes.



**1999 FORD F450**

Stock# d76579 - v10 gas engine - automatic trans - power windows - power locks holmes 440-1 - serial# 198 ita 1163 - 8 ton boom - 1 8,000lb winch - code 3 mx 7000 light bar - 2 insert tool boxes.



**1997 IH 4700**

Stock# 478854 - 444 v8 diesel - automatic trans - 258,000 miles - power windows vulcan 892 wrecker - serial# 892-00583 - 10 ton boom - 2-8k winches - 24" tunnel tool box - upper floods.



**1984 S MODEL IH**

Stock# a60581, 240hp cummins, 10 speed trans, 11 r24.5 tires, 182" wheelbase, century 712, 12 ton boom, 2-12,000lb winches, winch free spool handles, hydraulic rear spades, federal amber light bar.



**1996 FORD F450**

Stock# a10512 - 7.3 diesel - 5 speed trans - 247,000 miles - air conditioning - 15,000lb gvw jerr dan 19' alum - 8,000lb winch - steel cab protector - code 3 mx 7000 light bar - independent wheel lift - dual controls.



**1999 IH 4700**

Stock#206762, DT 466, 7-speed trans, 25,500 GVW, air conditioning, Vulcan model 896, Serial#896 00503, 12-ton boom, 84" steel body, 24" tunnel box, 2-12,000# winches.



**2003 IH 4300**

Stock# 578629, dt466 e 6cyl, automatic trans, 205,000 miles, 26,000# gvw Champion 21' steel, 10,000# deck, 8,000# winch, steel cab protector, cable tensioner, upper work lights.



**1995 CHEVY HD 3500**

Stock# 110654, 6.5 diesel, 5 speed trans, 15,000# gvw, air conditioning jerr dan 0808 8 ton, serial# 96039507, 8 ton boom, 2-8,000# winches, winch free spool extensions, alum body.

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# TOW LINES

## Letters to the editor from our readers

*T&R Footnotes invites and encourages readers to submit letters on any topic by email to the editor at [bcandler@traderonline.com](mailto:bcandler@traderonline.com). Publication and editing of letters will be in the editor's sole discretion.*

**To The Editor:**

The TRAA Safety Training Committee would like to say "Thank you" to everyone for participating in the recent TRAA Legal & Legislative Conference and for helping to make the release of the towing and recovery safety video "Everyone Goes Home" a huge success!

We raised close to \$4000 in video sales for the TRAA Education fund. As chairman of the video committee, I can tell you that from the committee's standpoint, all the hard work for five months to produce the video was well worth it. But this is only the beginning!

Here's a recap of the pledges made towards the second video: Bill Giorgis graciously donated the first \$2500 to the production of the second video, followed by O'Hare Towing (Marci Gratziana), United Road Towing (Tom Tedford), and Bill Byers for a grand total of \$10,000 to start the production of Volume II.

Some fantastic ideas for the second video were offered at the conference. The committee will have a conference call soon to decide what the topic will be. Our goal for the release of this video will be in the fall at the TRAA meeting.

This video means great things for the TRAA, not only from a safety standpoint for all towers but financially as well. It will create awareness within the Federal highway administration and other related entities.

It is very exciting for the committee that we will be able to do so much with one video, so think what we can

accomplish with 10 videos! If you have any comments or suggestions, please call or email me.

**Angela Roper**  
TRAA Video Committee Chair  
512-863-7300

**To The Editor**

I had the opportunity to read the article you recently published on the need for public relations for towers and your request for comments on page 5 of the March 2007 issue. I work for AAA Auto Club South in the Public & Government Relations Department and have the great fortune to work on a program called "Tow To Go," which we offer and may soon be offered by some of our other clubs in the AAA Federation.

Tow To Go provides a confidential ride home and a tow free of charge to anyone in a bar or restaurant who may have had too much to drink. All the person has to do is call 800-AAA-HELP. Services are offered in Savannah, Metro Atlanta, Metro Nashville, and throughout Florida.

I can't begin to tell you how wonderful it is to work on a program that is already credited for removing more than 6,400 drunk drivers off our roadways. It happens to run almost entirely on word of mouth and through third-party media coverage.

Next to gas prices, it happens to be one of our biggest programs for generating media attention before every major holiday and Super Bowl. It also gives our towing contractors an opportunity to be interviewed and share with media why they are so dedicated to the program and why Tow To Go works at protecting everyone on the roadways, not just the intoxicated driver.

I can't think of a better program to illustrate the power of positive PR for the towing industry and those associated with Tow To Go. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments. Thanks so much!

**Joanna Vose Newton**  
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**To The Editor:**

As we move on well into the year 2007, I see some changes to the auto industry taking place and their effects on towing. For starters, I think transmission shops will start falling by the wayside. Already the national transmission chains have started doing general auto repair to make up for all the work they will lose because of the automakers' extended power-train warranties. Towers will lose out on the commercial-rate tows to these shops, and the tow work will go to the cheaper roadside assistance towers.

The manufacturers of wreckers and rollbacks are pushing to manufacture more bodies and higher-priced trucks. The more new trucks, the more used trucks for the wanna-bes to buy. Most of your gas stations currently are like towers: high volume, lower prices. Unfortunately, towing is on its slide down the tubes. Manufacturers want to sell trucks and towers want to fall into the high-volume, low-pay game.

And representation of the towers in some of the media is not in the interest of most towers. Some towing magazines have run out of things to write about, so they include cartoons and show pictures of pretty trucks. What a way to portray this industry! The writer is using Flintstones dinosaurs in the cartoon now, and the one thing I get from this cartoon is that towers are still living back in the Stone Age. And how many ways can the magazines blow smoke about motor clubs?

One of the manufacturers' propaganda magazines prints what I call "blond jokes." Some examples: Blond joke #1 tells you that you should buy new trucks because if a truck breaks down, you will lose money, and if you have a new truck, it comes with a warranty. Well, just because it has a warranty, does that mean it will not

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## Towing & Recovery Footnotes®

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# BRAINSTORMIN WITH STORMIN NORMAN

## A Simple Question

*Always ask yourself  
what a real professional would do*

**By Stormin Norman Horton**

I wrote this article shortly after the recent tornado came through our area. It hit not only Enterprise, Alabama, which most people heard about because of the fatalities, but it came through Echo, where we live, as well. From what I have seen, you couldn't have done a better job with a bomb. The communities in each of these two areas (and I am sure in Missouri and Georgia as well) all worked together to help with the rescue and clean-up.

There were at least three major and several smaller towing companies in the Enterprise area that worked together to assist with cleaning up around the high school. We had a trade-in truck from Bobby Jackson that we donated for use during the clean-up as well.

Okay, that's nice, you say – but what does this have to do with professionalism?

### Working Together

As professionals these towers were working together to give back to their community in a time of need after a disaster. They checked their competitiveness and other differences at the street and worked side by side to clean the area in a very organized manner, while the local agencies were still struggling to get their acts together.

Those of you in the towing business know that what is seen and heard on the news is sometimes different from what actually happens on the ground and behind the scenes. As towers, the scuttlebutt that we hear and the lack of coordination by the different law enforcement and other agencies that we see can be quite interesting at times – but it is never revealed to the public.

*“You should start  
by presenting a  
professional  
image”*

— Stormin' Norman

I am certainly proud to say that these towers showed professionalism by working together and not fighting among themselves. Kudos to Good-year Towing, Southeast Towing, and Wiregrass Towing for their hard work and mutual cooperation.

So the question of the day is: Are you a real towing professional – or not? If you are a professional and want to be treated as professional, then you should start by presenting a professional image. As I have said in a previous

article, perception is reality, so how do you project the right perception?

### Beyond Image

This can be done by having professional-looking trucks, drivers with uniforms, and professionally prepared invoices that are based on a professional rate sheet with a detailed professional description that covers one to two pages, clearly reflecting that you are a real pro – that you are someone who knows what he is doing. It will show that you know exactly why you charged what you did for the service.

A professional demeanor is also a plus. One does not need to get mad, scream, rant, rave, cuss, and holler just because you had a customer who was upset with you or because you had a driver who did something he shouldn't have. Treat your drivers like professionals, even if they have not quite arrived at that point yet.

Having a professional method of dealing with other customers and insurance companies is very important. You have to remember that when they are trying to beat you down on your bill they are just doing their job. If you want to play in their field, you need to put on your professional hat and play like a professional with them. For example, when you are presenting a bill to them, present it in terms they will understand, such as: “We have a \$9000 rollover here but we saved \$20,000 in frozen chicken breasts for you, and by the way, the trailer is also okay.”

### You Weren't There

Another area we towers need to work on is this: When the insurance adjuster or customer presents you with an invoice from your competitor and you think it is a touch high, that is not the time to make yourself look better by standing on their head. That is the time to be professional and say “You know, I was not there and there must have been some circumstances that would

justify this. I am sure this guy is reasonable and will discuss it with you.”

You don't know exactly what happened. Sure, you can give an educated guess, but why do you want to cut your nose off to spite your face? That's rather shortsighted. You might end up in a similar situation and come up with that same bill, and you just told that adjuster that it is not a justifiable price. So be professional about it.

“Professional” also is paying your employees correctly and not under the table as independent contractors, which, as you know, people are prone to do in the towing industry. This is stealing from your employees. If you have a business large enough to have employees, then treat them as employees, not as independent contractors – unless you want some new competitors!

So always ask yourself as you go about your daily business, “Am I acting like a true professional? Or not?”

*The views expressed in this column each month are the opinion of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the editorial position of this publication.*

### Stormins' Online Poll

Here's your chance to let towers know what's on your mind about the towing and recovery industry!

On Stormin Norman's website at [www.stormins.com](http://www.stormins.com), you can vote (anonymously) on issues of interest to towing and recovery owners and operators everywhere – and then read about the results of the voting on Stormin's website and in *T&R Footnotes*.

Here's how you voted on a recent question:

**How many competitors do you have within a 25- to 100-mile radius?**

Choice:	Percentage
• 1-5	.....12%
• 6-10	.....6%
• 11-20	.....12%
• 20-plus	.....50%
• None. I'm it.	.....19%

Stormin invites you to visit [www.stormins.com](http://www.stormins.com) and vote on the next question...

## TOW LINES

continued from page 3

break down? What if your new truck is a lemon?

Blond joke #2 says you should over-staff your company. Well, this must have been written by someone who goes through employees as fast as I change my underwear; either that or they have very unreliable employees who don't show up for work. However, everyone else is saying that there is a shortage of good help. Must be nice to be able to pay someone to stand around all day.

Blond joke #3 went like this: We had a flood in our area and we went to a flooded parking garage where other towers were content to wait for the floodwaters to recede before towing the vehicles, but my guy swam out to the car, dove underwater, and hooked up the car. Well, let me tell you, the other towers were right! You let your guy

swim in floodwaters with sewage, chemicals, and who knows what else for a car that was now junk! Are you that hard up for a job? (Someone should read these things before they get printed.)

Other jokes are the names these people come up with for towing professionals like Warriors, Tow Bosses, etc. Try telling someone you're a tow boss and they will think you're in charge of a bunch of feet or have a foot fetish.

This is how I see it, but then again I may need glasses. Anyway, 2007 should continue to be an interesting year.

### The Towing Curmudgeon

**To the Editor:**

I am the owner and operator of Momma's Towing and have been in business 15-plus years. I run one medium-duty tow truck, a flatbed, and a four-wheel-drive for the winter, which I take off the road in the off-sea-

son to save a little money. I'm a volunteer firefighter, I currently serve in the U.S. Army, and I'm a full-time dad. For the past 15 years, I have worked with the state police, the Dutchess County sheriff's department, and two other local police departments.

I used to tow for dealers, auto clubs, and other auto repair shops that used to be around. As we all know, auto clubs have taken over almost all dealers and have cut us right out of the market. When the auto clubs call us, it's credit cards or cash only, no checks – take it or leave it. There are a few towers in the county who do auto clubs. If that's what they want to do, fine, but not me!

As the smaller auto repair shops tend to shut down, the ones who've made it have found a way to make money off of us towers. We are our own worst enemy by cooperating in this. The idiots who tow for these brand-name shops for under \$50 a tow permit the Firestones, Goodyears,

and others to make even more money off the customer at our industry's expense. When you bring a car in for \$75 a tow, the shop manager says, “You're charging too much; I have a guy who can do it for \$15 cheaper.”

We need to stop this now! Let those businesses get their own tow trucks and drivers instead of using the smaller towers who tow so cheaply. It's the larger, well-known companies in my area that are doing this; that is one way they put the smaller auto repair shops out of business.

We need to tell the Firestones, the Goodyears, and others that we aren't going to tow your vehicles cheaply anymore. If they can get away with charging \$500 or more for a repair job, they can sure afford to pay for our tows and not make more money off our backs.

**Tom Masch**

Momma's Towing  
Wappinger falls, NY



## HOME ON THE ROAD

continued from page 1

And don't forget the foliage: Dangling tree limbs create additional hazards for towers as some RVs extend as high as 14 feet into the air. So-called "basement unit" RVs offer lots of storage space underneath the floor, which increases the height of the vehicle.

### Hooking Up

Every coach is a brand-new challenge, said Stenberg. "We have to figure out how to hook up each individual one. A lot of times we have problems because there's not enough room, and we have to move things out of the way to hook up."

As with any recovery job, hooking up in the right places is critical. "Towing operators need to be knowledgeable about where they can and can't pick up a motor home," noted Doug Tolbert, president of Powerhouse Coach in Idaho Falls, ID. "A wheel lift is almost dictated these days because chassis aren't designed to have that weight anywhere but on the wheels."

Some sort of instruction manual would be helpful, said Norman Stenberg. "The American Automobile Association and General Motors, for example, have books that show you how to hook up and tow a car. Motor home dealers have nothing like that."

Like many tow company owners, Stenberg supplements the basic certification provided by organizations like the Towing and Recovery Association of America with local hands-on instruction. Put simply: no experience, no towing.

"In my company," said Stenberg, "you don't do anything until you have 30 hours on the road with me. I personally train all of my employees." In addition, Stenberg praised the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program offered by individual states.

### Little Error, Big Bucks

The possibility of doing additional damage to a crippled luxury coach makes many tow operators uneasy, with good reason. With some motor homes valued into the million-dollar range, one tiny error can be devastating to a tower. "One scratch to a coach with an expensive mural or a custom clear-coat paint job can cost thousands of dollars to fix," said Bill Robertson.

Norman Stenberg recalled a very delicate recovery job: "One time I went out to pick up a motor home. I got out there and I'm looking at a brand-new Monarch." [One of Monarch's newest vehicles boasts a gross weight of 22,000 pounds, a 242-inch wheelbase, a length of nearly 37 feet and a height of 12 feet.] "I walked up to the vehicle," Stenberg continued, "and the price tag was still on it — \$500,000. That brings up a lot of liability issues."

To protect himself and his company, Stenberg carries a liability insurance policy worth \$1 million. He cautioned that tow operators who strike



A custom-built coach by Doug Tolbert, Powerhouse Coach, Idaho Falls, Idaho. Tolbert is a former tow company owner who now builds luxury coaches with "towability" incorporated into his coach designs.

Doug Tolbert



Looking forward to the comfortable cab

Doug Tolbert



Looking back into towable luxury

Doug Tolbert

a bump in the road risk fracturing the skin of the luxury coach. "I know of one company that was towing just a regular motor home, not even one of the big coaches. They hit a bump really hard and broke the skin of the motor home. That accident cost the tow company \$46,000."

### Tow-Friendly Design

How can manufacturers design luxury coaches that are friendlier to the tow operator? Doug Tolbert of Powerhouse Coach has one answer. Tolbert brings a unique perspective to the table: he's a former tow operator

who now builds custom motor homes for a living. His experiences with towing motor homes inspired him to move into the production arena.

"I had a towing company and an auto body shop," he recalled. "I saw the problems with production coaches. So I built one for my own personal use." Local customers were impressed with Tolbert's work and asked him to build RVs to their specifications. What began

as a side interest gradually developed into a full-time business.

Tolbert uses Class 8 semi truck chassis — "million-mile chassis," as he called them — in the construction of his luxury coaches. "The typical motor home is underpowered and overloaded," he said. "If you look in a manufacturer's brochure, you'll find that many of these RVs are back-heavy even before you load water, fuel, and personal belongings into the vehicle. Consequently that chassis is being overworked all of the time."

During his time as a tow operator, Tolbert saw a lot of overheated motor homes whose engines and transmissions died while on the road. He also noticed that many motor homes stopped running because of fairly minor problems. "Unfortunately, if an RV broke down in a rural area, the owner couldn't get it fixed there because the parts were so specialized." By building luxury coaches using a semi truck chassis, Tolbert said, basic components like a drive-line U-joint or water pump hose are readily available almost anywhere.

### Talk To Towers

How can towers get more comfortable with towing luxury coaches? A major part of the solution lies in building motor homes that are more accessible to tow trucks. Al Gregg noted that engineers who design luxury coaches need to take the tow operator into account when the vehicles are on the drawing board.

"The manufacturers need to get together with the towing people," agreed Norman Stenberg. "It's important, because towing these coaches is risky and expensive." Stenberg noted that in north central Washington, it can cost up to \$250 an hour to tow a motor home.

Kevin Johnson of D&M Motors and Towing, Ellensburg, Washington was the towman who recovered the wrecked Winnebago Vectra on I-90 (see following story for the details). "Diesel pushers like these motor homes were never meant to be towed," he said, "so doing recovery work on these vehicles is a big job." But, he added, sometimes the challenge is worthwhile, as with his successful rescue of the Vectra luxury coach.

"You tow cars and trucks every week, said Johnson. "It's the more challenging recovery and tow jobs that drive our industry to improve our equipment and techniques on a constant basis."

See WRECKED VECTRA, page 7



Many luxury coaches to tow (when it warms up)



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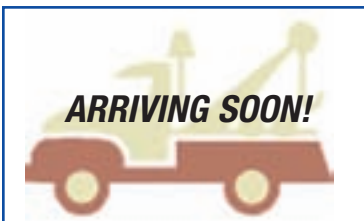
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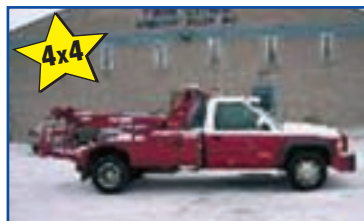
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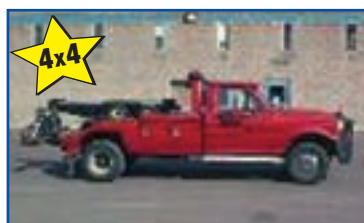
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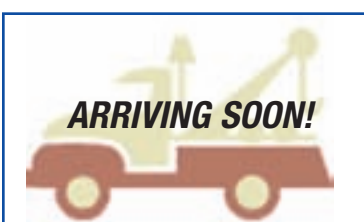
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## The Recovery Of The Wrecked Vectra



Kevin and Craig Johnson, D&M



Kevin and Craig Johnson, D&M



Kevin and Craig Johnson, D&M

A recovery operation by D&M Motors and Towing of Ellensburg, WA several years ago. Husband-and-wife retirees were towing their Suzuki Samurai behind their motor home on the I-90 when the husband fell asleep at the wheel. When he woke up, he swerved the vehicle, causing it to roll over and slide down the highway with the Samurai still attached by tow bar.

Training and experience were key during recovery operations for the luxury coach that toppled over on the I-90 in Washington. Kevin Johnson of D&M Motors and Towing, based in Ellensburg, supervised the tow. The RV had skidded to a stop on its right side, while the Suzuki Samurai it had been towing lay upside down, blocking the remainder of the two-lane roadway. Fortunately, the retired couple who owned the motor home had escaped the accident without injury by kicking out the passenger-side windshield and scrambling onto the asphalt.

Johnson and his team responded with a Holmes 1801 and a Vulcan 1616 to recover the motor home, and brought a Holmes 1201 to tow the Suzuki. The crippled luxury coach had come to rest in the fast lane with its tires pointed toward the shoulder. The shoulder,

protected by a steel guardrail, dropped off into a soft dirt embankment that rose from a small stream in the middle of the highway. Blocked by the guardrail, Johnson realized that he would be unable to perform a conventional recovery.

Johnson parked his Holmes 1801 parallel to the motor home and just three inches away from the guardrail. After positioning his truck's stiff leg for a side pull, Johnson placed the Vulcan on the opposite side of the road, next to the center embankment. "We used two guardrail posts as winch anchors," he explained. "We connected in front, up over the frame, then back over the front axle. Then we winched the vehicle into an upright position." At first, the luxury coach threatened to slide on its side so Johnson inserted a steel chock under the flat tire and wheel.

Careful planning and placement of equipment resulted in a successful motor home recovery. "You have to pull awfully hard when you're using the frame to upright something," said Johnson, "because you don't have much leverage – maybe two feet from the center of the vehicle – to pivot it up." By connecting to the frame, Johnson avoided any further damage to the motor home.

The cleanup of hazardous materials is also a consideration during recovery operations with motor homes. During the I-90 incident in which the sleepy driver sent his luxury coach into a long skid on the highway, the damaged vehicle soaked the road with engine oil. Kevin Johnson thought about shaking gravel or sand on the liquid to soak it up, but instead carefully avoided the spill. "Our local law enforcement and our insurance company had both cautioned

us about the presence of HazMat at an accident site. They said, 'Let the Department of Transportation handle that. You're not in the HazMat business.'" So Johnson worked around the spill.

Later, when the RV owners' insurance firm contacted Johnson about the accident, "they expected to declare the vehicle as totaled," he remembered. "I said, 'When you come look at it, you might be surprised at how good a condition it's in.'" The insurance company thought that the tow chain and straps might have caused some injury to the vehicle, but were surprised to find no additional damage to the coach or chassis.

Johnson and his team had performed a solid, safe tow operation. Instead of being shuttled off to the junkyard, the motor home was re-towed by Johnson to a repair facility and soon it was back on the road again.

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# TOW BUSINESS

## Coming Out Ahead

*Critical tips for the successful sale of a towing business*

**By Torrey Meeks**

### Many Factors

**W**hen a tower first considers selling a business he's built up over the course of a lifetime, it can be intimidating. It's easy to push such thoughts aside and ignore the fact that one day it'll be time to kick back, sip a beer on the porch, and enjoy the golden years.

Never fear, said Gary Coe, owner of numerous businesses in the Portland, OR area. With some foresight and planning – skills that come in handy no matter where a tower is in his business life – selling can be turned into a manageable process that allows a tower to get out with maximum profits.

### Rural Shops

Towing businesses can be broken down into two distinct categories when it comes to selling: rural shops and city shops. Each situation has unique challenges that need to be considered well in advance of a decision to sell.

Bill Tomlinson, long-time tower and owner of Tomlinson's, Inc. in Ashland, WI, knows all about the difficulties in trying to sell from a location that is off the beaten path. Often a rural shop like Tomlinson's is the only game in town. That is one of the primary differences between a city shop and a rural shop. Furthermore, towers in rural locations often wear many different hats, taking on a wide range of jobs that are not strictly big highway recoveries.

In rural areas, the wrecker boom often comes in handy for more diverse uses than primarily hauling semis off highway shoulders. Tomlinson has hauled everything from downed planes to boats out of lakes, finding each recovery to be a unique challenge that he enjoys.

Like Tomlinson's, rural shops can be quite profitable. They generally do not have the same competition issues that city shops have. However, problems can pop up when it is time to sell. Tomlinson's business has been on the market for close to two years. So far, there haven't been any firm offers.

Why the difficulty? Tomlinson said it could be any number of factors, but the biggest is attracting buyers to the location. "There are some guys that would read an advertisement and say, 'Boy, that'd be a place to go. I've got a few dollars. Maybe it'd be fun to go there.'"

Once in a while he will get a tentative nibble from individuals who sound receptive to the idea of buying away from the city. However, when it comes time to check out the location, potential buyers arrive thinking they have left civilization. Not a fair assessment in Tomlinson's opinion.

"We're just a little bit off the beaten path, and US-2 carries a fair amount of traffic east to west," he said. "There's a lot of Canadian traffic. We've got medical facilities and good schools."

Another perk is that Tomlinson's business has been successful enough to afford him the luxury of regular travel. He has been all over the world on vacations and business trips, proving that someone who buys in a rural location is not locked into one patch of earth.

The commute has been another benefit to Tomlinson's rural location.

His travel time to work is 15 minutes – walking. That's a timesaver when there's snow on the ground, said Tomlinson, and beats any traffic-clogged, hour-long city drive.

Based on his experience, however, towers in rural areas who are considering a sale like Tomlinson's should factor in the possibility of having the business on the market for a long time and begin advertising well in advance.

### City Shops

The difficulties in selling city shops are more readily apparent, said Coe. While there usually is not a problem finding buyers, more towing companies in one area mean competition is much more fierce and profit margins are usually lower per tow.

The good news, said Coe, is that if towers run their towing operation like a proper business, external factors like fuel prices and regulatory



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issues don't really matter. A savvy tower will adjust for such things and still manage to run a highly profitable operation. Coe's shops, for example, did record business in 2006.

How saleable a business is often depends on how well the owner is running the operation. For both rural and city shops, the biggest thing to pay attention to when selling, said Coe, is profitability – it's the trump card by a landslide.

"If you have a viable business, it's making a profit, and there's a solid block of business, I think it's very likely that you can sell," said Coe. Sellers in both locations, however, still need to keep in mind that preparation for sale may take up to a year in advance.

### Formula One

Why a year? Many shop owners find it advantageous from a tax standpoint to run certain expenses such as fuel, company meals, and dry cleaning through their businesses. While covering those expenses make it easier for the tower financially, this cuts into the bottom line and it's important to show maximum profit when selling a business.

Cutting down expenses is important, said Coe, because of a common formula buyers use to evaluate businesses in most industries. It's called "Earnings Before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortization," or EBITDA. Using this formula, the bottom line is multiplied by four



**Bill Tomlinson with three of his trucks. The well-insulated and natural gas-heated building is 100' by 60' with two large doors on one end and one large one on the other. Tomlinson said that the building "has enough doors to get nine vehicles out without moving anything else."**

or five times to establish the business' real value.

For example, let's say a selling tower cuts \$50,000 of optional expenses out of his after-tax bottom line the year before he sells. By the EBITDA formula, cutting out those expenses translates to \$200,000 in additional business value that will appeal to prospective buyers.

### Strategic Sales

According to Coe, the best way to assure maximum profit is to prepare your business for sale with the expectation that a buyer will be using the EBITDA formula. However, EBITDA

is not as crucial for towers who don't want to completely get out of the business.

"There are exceptions," said Coe. "Those are what I call strategic sales. If you're in a town and the guy in the next town really wants to sell, there's the opportunity to get together. Maybe it doesn't make a difference as to what the earnings are now, because the buyer thinks he can do better than you can."

This method is very similar to a merger. It can be advantageous to a tower who wants to give up ownership of his company, but doesn't want to completely get out of the towing business. Instead, he runs it from a

managerial role and lets the buyer handle the business side. In this case, the EBITDA formula doesn't play as large a role. The tower can still get out, the money is made on the sale of his business, but he is still involved.

### What You Can Get

The third and final method applies to towers who absolutely have to sell their businesses right away. Sometimes it's not possible to wait around for a year in order to make the bottom line look as appealing as possible. In this case, towers can go the wholesale route – they literally sell the buildings, land, and trucks and pocket whatever cash they can make.

A tower may take a financial hit to sell this way. However, it is useful if the owner is facing a problem like an unforeseen medical condition or has had the business on the market for too long and can't get out from under it with either of the other scenarios.

Ultimately, said Coe, there really isn't a way to tell how long it's going to take to sell a business. As a buyer, he's had deals go through in a couple of weeks, while other sales were years in the making.

The foresight, planning, and patience that go into selling a business underscores one simple fact: Getting out often draws on the same skills that it takes to get in and stay in. ❧

See A BUSINESS FOR SALE page 10



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- Room for regular tow trucks and heavy-duty truck and trailer repair
- One drive-through stall, plus five other doors to adequately accommodate seven vehicles
- Five additional stalls are accessible by moving one vehicle
- Office, reception, and dispatch area is 24' x 30'; includes rest rooms and parts room
- Upstairs area includes drivers' sleeping quarters with shower and extra parts storage space
- Efficient natural gas heat

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- 30-ton Trebron wrecker, Ford Aeromax, tri-axle, Trebron under-lift, telescopic 29-foot boom
- 750 Holmes with Trebron leg, single-axle Ford Louisville
- 600 Holmes on a 7000 series GMC with added wheel lift, front winch
- International 1700 2-ton with 500 Holmes hydraulic boom conversion and hydraulic leg, factory four wheel drive.
- Two 4WD one-tons, Century and Challenger with crane and wheel-lift 21' carrier on 6500 series GMC, wheel lift
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# The Laugh List

## Unanswered Questions

- I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, "Where's the self-help section?" She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.
- If a deaf person swears, does his mother wash his hands off with soap?
- If a parsley farmer is sued, can they garnish his wages?
- Why do they lock gas station bathrooms? Are they afraid someone will clean them?
- If the police arrest a mime, do they tell him he has the right to start speaking?
- How do they get deer to cross the road only at those yellow road signs?
- What was the best thing before sliced bread?
- How is it possible to have a civil war?
- If one synchronized swimmer drowns, do the rest drown too?
- If you try to fail and succeed, which have you done?
- Whose cruel idea was it for the word "lisp" to have an "s" in it?
- Why is it called tourist season if we can't shoot at them?
- If you spin an Oriental man in a circle three times does he become disoriented?

## Call The Police!!

George was going up to bed when his wife told him that he'd left the light on in the garden shed, which she could see from the bedroom window. George opened the back door to go turn off the light but saw that there were people in the shed, most likely stealing things.

He phoned the police and the dispatcher asked, "Are any of those people in your house?" When George said "No," the dispatcher said that all patrols were busy, that he should just stay in the house, lock his doors, and an officer would be along when available.

George said, "Okay," hung up, counted to 60, and phoned the police again. He said, "Hello, I just called you a minute ago because there were people in my shed. Well, you don't have to worry about them now because I just shot them all." He hung up.

Within five minutes, three police cars, an armed response unit, and an ambulance showed up at his residence. After the police caught the burglars red-handed, one of the policemen said to George: "I thought you said that you'd shot them!"

George said, "I thought you said there was nobody available."

You are invited to join the Minnesota Professional Towing Association in celebrating 25 years of service to the towing industry.

MPTA will be hosting a trade show July 27-28, 2007 at Treasure Island Resort and Casino in Welch Minnesota, just outside of Red Wing.



Events will include educational sessions, activities for kids including a LEGO truck building contest and radio control car races, TRAA certification testing, a working tow truck contest, awards and recognition banquet and lots of time for networking and visiting with vendors.

For more information please contact MPTA at 1-800-627-MPTA or visit our Web site at [www.mnprotow.org](http://www.mnprotow.org)

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2005 International 4300, Dt466, Automatic Transmission, Loaded, Air Compressor, Chevron 21' Series 14 Steel Carrier, Stationary Head Rack, 2 Stainless 48" Tool Boxes, Vertical Stack, Strobe Light Bar. #9354A

2004 Ford F550XLT, 6.0 Diesel, Automatic Transmission, Dynamic 701 BSW Wrecker, Strobe Lightbar, Nerf Bars. One Owner Truck! #9344A

2000 Chevy HD3500 LS Edition, 454 V8, Auto Trans, A/C, Brand New Air-Flo 8' Dump Body & Hoist, New Tires & Brakes. #8956A

2003 Ford F450 SuperDuty, V-10 Engine, Automatic Transmission, A/C, Vulcan Single-Line Wrecker, Super Clean Truck, Only 80K Miles. #9333A

2002 Ford F550 XLT 4x4, Diesel, Auto, Dynamic 601 BDW, Strobe Light Bar, 29 Gal Fuel Tank. #8838A - \$32,500

2002 Ford F550 XLT SuperDuty, Diesel, Auto Trans, A/C, Power Windows & Locks, Loaded, Chevron 19' Steel Carrier & Ind Wheelift. #8967A

2000 Ford F450 XLT, 7.3 Diesel, 6-Speed, Jerrdan Hip40 Wheelift. #8943A - \$19,500

1999 International 4700 T444e, 5-Speed, 21' Dynamic Steel Tiltbed with

auto-load Wheelift, Stationary Head Rack. #9351A

1998 Chevy HD3500, Gas V-8, Manual, A/C, Century Single-Line & Ind Wheelift, 84" CA. #9088A

2000 Chevy HD3500, Gas V-8, Auto, Vulcan Single-Line & Ind Wheelift, 84" CA. #9127A

2000 Ford F450 XL, Diesel, 6-Speed Manual Transmission, A/C, AM/FM Radio, Chevron 408 Single-Line with Autogrip Wheelift, Inside Cab Controls. #8750A - \$29,500.

1997 Ford F450 S/D, Gas V-8, 5-Speed Manual, Jerrdan Single-Line with AutoGrip. #9080A

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Zip's Freightliner M2 automatic with a Century 22-foot aluminum carrier

Email us about your company's new or improved tow truck chassis and bodies, parts and equipment, and accessories. Send your product news with any photos or art to [bcandler@traderonline.com](mailto:bcandler@traderonline.com).

### Low-Profile Racing Jacks

With low-profile heights starting at four inches for the JK7 and only four and 1/8 inches for the JK10, these jacks from AW Direct fit under any low-riding vehicle and allow for storing in tight spaces. Both jacks feature a saddle that rotates a full 360 degrees and include a rubber pad to prevent marring and damage to vehicles. Just four pumps fully extend these jacks.



AW Direct's low-profile, rotating jacks

The two-piece handle collapses for easy storage. A single-grip handle on the JK7 allows for easier mobility. The JK7 has a 1.5-ton lifting capacity and the JK10 a three-ton capacity. Both conform to ANSI/ASME safety standards. Contact AW Direct at 800-243-3194.

### Three-Car Carrier

Zip's new three-car carrier is more efficient than a two-car carrier and more convenient and less expensive than a four-car carrier. A three-car carrier allows a driver to haul at least two vehicles no matter what their condition as well as a third if it is towable. Zip's, in cooperation with Miller Industries, designed the carrier to handle three cars without adding bed length because the third car is hauled on a top deck above the cab.

Zip's carrier has a 13-foot, six-inch top deck and 21- or 22-foot main deck, which are available in aluminum or steel. The main deck has a 15,000-pound capacity. Floors are available in smooth steel, smooth aluminum, steel treadplate, or extruded aluminum. A wheel lift allows for the towing of a third vehicle. Call 800-222-6047.

### Wireless Remote

Landoll Corporation has selected Kar-Tech Inc of Delafield, WI as their vendor to supply the "Mini" series wireless remote controls for their 2008 Traveling Axle, Traveling Tail, and

Container trailers. Installed at the Landoll factory, the wireless remote will control three hydraulic valve spools or six complete functions. In most cases the wireless remote controls hydraulic movement of the traveling undercarriage, the winch, and the trailer tilting deck.

Landoll operators will have full hydraulic operation of their trailer at a safe working distance and the capability of performing multiple tasks at the same time. The Mini series has totally sealed switches on the handheld transmitter that fits in the palm of your

hand and will conduct its own self-diagnostics, including notifying the operator of any shorted or open wires.

Landoll Corporation of Marysville Kansas also manufactures a line of Detachables, Bottom Dumps, Multi-Car Trailers, and Tag Trailers. Contact them at 800-428-5655 or visit [www.landoll.com](http://www.landoll.com)

### Hands-Free Work Light

Invented by a towman, the PODLight is a three-in-one cordless, rechargeable, hands-free, rugged LED



New wireless controls for your Landoll



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worklight, flashlight, and double-flashing safety strobe that makes working in hazardous nighttime conditions safer for towmen. It has a 360-degree repositionable collar with a strong magnet as well as a fully rotating nylon hook for hanging, which allows the light to be placed for maximum illumination in difficult places, such as under a car.

The PODLight can stay plugged into a truck's cigarette lighter indefinitely without draining the battery. Just a few hours of charging results in eight hours of cordless worklight, 12 hours of cordless flashlight, or over 48 hours of flashing safety strobe before recharging is needed. Call 315-468-4140, email podlight@lujanusa.com, or visit www.lujanusa.com/pod/pod\_light.htm



Three-in-one cordless Podlight

## The Colorado Show

The Colorado Tow Show, sponsored by the Towing & Recovery Professionals of Colorado, will be held June 21-23 at Copper Fields Event Chateau in Wheat-

ridge, CO. The show will have vendors and a beauty competition as well offering TRAA Driver Certification Levels I & II, a two-day Tow School, roadside safety seminar, roadside safety/flagger certification course, driving competition, light show, and kids' activities, a picnic, and Casino Night. Call Connie Antill at 303-789-2593.

## New From towPartners

TowHR and towPartners have partnered to provide towPartners members with workers compensation, payroll, human resource services, and employee benefits.

TowHR provides extraordinary savings options to towPartners member companies, including a guaranteed 10 percent or more reduction in member's workers comp rates. See www.towpartners.com.

## New Cab Protector

The Sidewinding Cab Protector from Danco utilizes the features of our frame-mounted cab protector. It allows the operator to winch vehicles from either side of the unit



Danco's Sidewinding Cab Protector

while parked in a neutral traffic position. The Sidewinding Cab Protector comes standard with hydraulic stabilizer legs that have adjustable pads for working on a hard surface or ice gougers that penetrate for added stability. The dual hydraulic controls

are centrally located for easy access by the operator. The Sidewinding Cab Protector also includes a wireless remote for the winch. Call 800-453-2626 or visit www.dancoproducts.com

## It's Miller Time



New body option for Century 3212 & Vulcan V-30



New multi-positional flipper foot option



New body option for Century Express & Midnight Express, Vulcan 807 & Intruder



New tire lift for Century & Vulcan

**New aluminum body.** Miller Industries has introduced a newly designed aluminum body option to their popular Century Express and Century Midnight Express, as well as the Vulcan 807 and Intruder. These modular body self-loaders feature adjustable body sides for several different chassis widths, eliminating the need to use fender flares that protrude and are easily knocked off. The aluminum sides can be painted to match any chassis, while the deck remains a shiny aluminum tread plate.

The re-designed rear body slope provides excellent rear visibility when hooking

or unhooking from a vehicle. Left and right locking tool compartments are standard on the 60-inch CA units, and a 24-inch aluminum tunnel box can be added for 84-inch CA applications. For more information, contact your local Century or Vulcan distributor, see www.millerind.com, or call 800-292-0330.

**Another new body.** Miller also offers a newly designed aluminum body option to their popular Century 3212 as well as the Vulcan V-30. The new 120-foot C.A. body includes many of the same features as the present models of the 3212 and V-30, such as illuminated tool boxes, crossover tunnel

box, and winch air-free spools, but is designed without the rear control compartments to provide better rear visibility while reducing cost and weight. For more information, contact your local Century or Vulcan distributor, see www.millerind.com, or call 800-292-0330.

**Tire lift option.** Miller has introduced a 25,000-pound tire lift for the Century 9055 and 7035 and the Vulcan V-70 and V-100 Heavy-Duty Integrated Towing and Recovery units. The new tire lift was engineered to reduce unnecessary weight on the attachment but still provide the capacity to lift vehicles with heavy front axles, such as

mixers and fire trucks. This new tire-lift will include the upgraded cross-bar. For more information, contact your local Century or Vulcan distributor, call 800-292-0030 or see www.millerind.com

**Vulcan flipper feet.** Vulcan has a new option for the V-100, V-70, & NV-50 Heavy-Duty Integrated Towing and Recovery Units, a multi-positional flipper foot option that can be configured in three different positions: a flat foot, spade, or shovel position to provide sure footing for your unit on a variety of different surfaces. For more information, contact your local Vulcan distributor or call 800-489-2401.



# HAULING HISTORY

## Red Rider

*An antique tow truck adds color to a unique museum*

By John Gunnell

Finished in a very eye-catching red and white two-tone paint scheme, a 1948 Nash factory-built wrecker is only one of the many rarities to be found at the Pioneer Auto Show in Murdo, South Dakota. The hard-to-find hauler from Kenosha, Wisconsin joins thousands of other unique attractions that Dave Geisler and his family have gathered and brought to the Murdo museum since their collection of Americana started in way back in 1954.

Pioneer Auto Show is nearly impossible to miss if you like tow trucks. An ancient, but big heavy-duty wrecker that long ago stopped plying its trade sits right in front of a large "Pioneer Auto Show" sign that borders I-90 at the junction of I-83 in Murdo. Both the sign and the finish on the vehicle are faded, but the truck itself is hard to overlook. Now, if you spot it, you'll know that it serves as a sentinel to the past.

Pioneer Auto Show is actually a complex of 38 buildings that includes a motel, a diner, a gas station, and the cars, trucks, bikes, tractors, and other memorabilia at the museum. Inside the facility are more than 250 special-interest cars and trucks, from a Model T to the *General Lee*.

Richard Petty's dirt track car, Dale Earnhardt's first stocker, Tom Mix's Packard and Elvis Presley's 1976 Harley-Davidson are other headline attractions. There are also about 50 antique tractors, 45 motorcycles, and countless other collectibles like toys, signs, gas pumps and even a railroad caboose.

### Rare Wrecker

The colorful Nash tow truck is nearly as rare as some of the stones in the Zeitner Collection of rocks, gems, and fossils also showcased at Pioneer Auto Show. These tow trucks were only available for a short while, and each



Less than 5,000 of these Nash tow trucks were made

Nash dealer in the country was allowed to purchase only one of them.

Charles Nash was the president of General Motors prior to 1916. Then he decided to buy the Thomas B. Jeffery car company headquartered in Kenosha. By the 1920s, Nash was making cars bearing his own name. Nash Motor Co. thrived in the 1930s and 1940s. After World War II, Nash made compact Ramblers, but also dabbled in truck building for a short time.

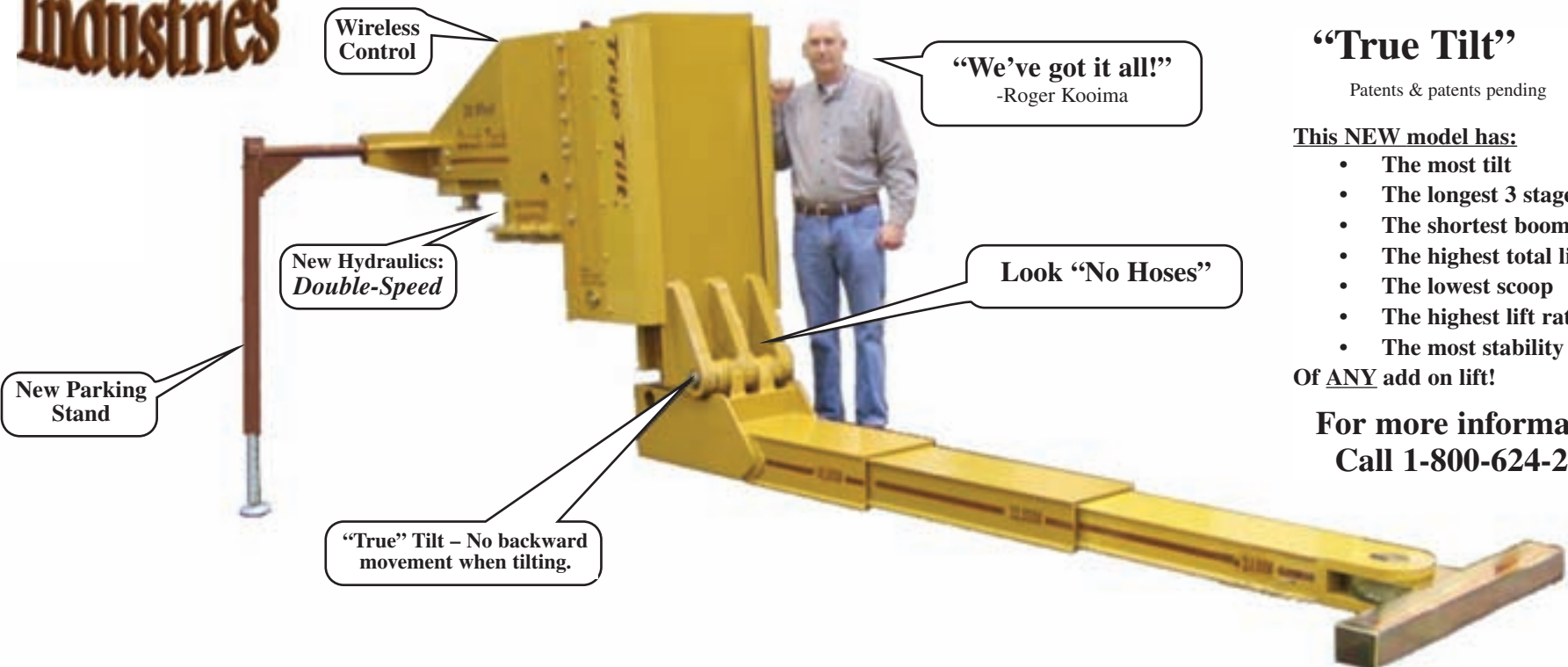
The Nash "Haul-Thrift" truck was destined to become a machine that you didn't see every day. From 1947 to 1954, Nash built 4,998 of them. They came in two similar models: the 3148 with a 133-inch wheelbase and the 3248 with a 157-inch wheelbase.

### Only One Allowed

While Nash trucks were made primarily for export to other countries, Nash dealerships in the United States could each order one of them to use as a tow truck. What could be cooler than having a tow truck of the same brand as the cars you sold?

Both Nash trucks were powered by the company's reliable 234.8-cid overhead valve in-line six-cylinder engine. It produced 104 hp at 3400 rpm and drove through a four-speed gearbox. A five-speed and a Timken double-reduction hypoid vacuum-shift rear axle that increased the number of forward "gears" to eight were available at additional cost.

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The Nash trucks – both models – had 14,000-pound GVW ratings with the standard axle or 15,500-pound GVW ratings with an optional two-speed rear axle. Eight-ply 7.00 x 20 tires were standard equipment and 10-ply 8.25 x 20s could be ordered at extra cost.

### Towing Ambassador

Even though Dave Geisler's Nash is not restored, it shows off some very fancy styling for a truck. That's because the body panels used for the fenders, hood, cab, and instrument panel came from the Nash's Ambassador, a rather luxurious passenger car. The Nash trucks' radiator grilles also had simplified copies of the Ambassador's grille. Brown vinyl upholstery was used to

make the inside of the cab a little bit fancier than the average truck interior of that era.

Even the smaller truck's wheelbase was a foot longer than that of the Ambassador car and its frame construction was strictly heavy-duty. Leaf springs with auxiliary helper springs were used all around. The front and single-speed rear axles were Timken-Detroit units and large Lockheed brakes supplied stopping power.

At Pioneer Auto Show, the two-toned Nash truck sits next to a boring, all-black 1939 Chevrolet. The truck looks far more exciting than the monotone, ebony-colored sedan. It carries advertising for "Ed's Towing & Repair" on its cab doors. Its single-boom hoist still looks very capable of doing vehicle recovery work if it had to. 🚚



The front-end sheet metal is from the postwar Nash Ambassador



The towing apparatus is so intact it looks ready to go



This old tow truck parked near a highway points the way to the Pioneer Auto Show

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August 7-8	2 Day - Heavy Duty	Buffalo	M - \$295 NM - \$395	Tom Luciano
August 16-17	2 Day - Heavy Duty	Albany	M - \$295 NM - \$395	Tom Luciano
Sept. 29-30	2 Day - Heavy Duty	Nassau / Suffolk	M - \$295 NM - \$395	Wes Wilburn

\* M - ESTRA / CNTA member, NM - Non member  
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**IN MY VIEW**

# How Florida Helped Texas

*A little chat at an association meeting had big results*

**By Jeanette Rash**

This year as with every year, I went to the Legal & Legislative Conference organized by the Towing & Recovery Association of America. It is a very good, informative meeting and one I always look forward to. We all get to talk about our problems in the industry and soon find that our problems must be contagious because everyone else has the same or similar problems.

It seems like Florida, California, and Texas (where I'm from) are always in some kind of a legislative pickle, so I make every effort to find out what is going on in Florida and California so that I might...put up a fence? Find a place to hide? Either get mad or be glad? I never really know what to expect but I know I will get some very valuable information to take back to Texas with me. (Yes, I know that sometimes Texas stuff is contagious too!)

At the TRAA meeting this year I talked with Sam Brewer about the problems the towing industry faced in Florida with insurance companies, and found out that they – the insurance companies – got a bill passed in Florida without the blessings or support of the Professional Wreckers Of Florida (PWF). We talked specifically about one particular insurance guy who was the “leader of the pack.” Since we here in Texas were already in legislative session, that definitely caught my attention.

Florida's association does an awesome job and has initiated and supported some big legislation that we would love to have in Texas. Our problem is we can't seem to get the focus away from the smaller issues that are nevertheless so important to our members. However, I often use Florida as a template for what can be achieved on a larger scale.

Well anyway, after the TRAA meeting, I went back to Texas and right off the bat I got a call from both our Senate sponsor's office and state House sponsor's office about “this insurance guy” who wanted to put a bunch of his stuff on our bill! Oh, crap! I couldn't believe my ears – it was the same guy who pulled the stunt on the PWF with the Florida bill! Mr. Insurance Man wants to regulate our rates for towing and recovery incident scenes, among other regs he's working on for Texas.

Had I not had the conversation with Sam, I probably would have not been



Jeanette Rash of Fast Tow in Houston

as aware of this issue, but now, knowing that the insurance companies were able to pull something on the Florida towing guys, I realized I had better pay attention – really close attention!

So we did what Texans do best – we circled the wagons! Our association has great members and when the call goes out, they respond. The right calls were made, we got our act together, and now it looks like the insurance companies are going to support our bills and work with us instead of against us on some issues – such as “us getting paid,” among others.

When Texas is in legislative session, nothing is safe from or off limits to the Texas legislature. We have killed and amended several bills that would require us to store vehicles for free – stolen vehicles, no-insurance vehicles, whatever! Can you imagine? And we missed one bad House bill that allowed law enforcement and other government agencies to drive and use a towed, stolen or other recovered vehicle as long as they want to and then hold a public auction, but we'll amend it or kill it on the Senate side. Shoot! And I thought Texas was still in America until this bill passed the House recently! Again, nothing here is safe!

Our bill – SB1118/HB2958 – is extensive and will categorize towing companies, require training and certification for drivers, move us to another state department, and give the department some teeth to enforce the rules and regulations. You can view the bill on Texas Legislature Online and track it, too.

Our association, the Texas Towing & Storage Association, has an outstanding reputation at the Capitol in Austin because we have always put the public first in our decision-making efforts

See HOW FLORIDA HELPED, page 18



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## HOW FLORIDA HELPED

continued from page 17

on legislative matters. That is the key to our success.

But I have to thank Sam Brewer and the Florida guys for the knowledge they shared that helped us out, and I also have to thank Harriet Cooley for her work in bringing us all together to share valuable information and learn from each other. A trip to that TRAA meeting in Virginia where I talked to a man from Florida sure did help us in Texas!

I hope that you will come and share and learn with us, too, whether it is with TRAA or your own state association. Together, we can better protect ourselves today to achieve an even better tomorrow – for each and every one of us in the industry we love. ❖

*Jeanette Rash of FastTow in Houston is Legislative Chairwoman for the Texas Towing & Storage Association and 2nd Vice-President of the Towing & Recovery Association of America.*

## Elect TRAA Officers

The TRAA Spring Board Meeting and Annual Business Meeting will be held at the Western States Tow Show on Thursday, May 31, 2007. Ballots were sent by first-class mail to all regular TRAA members 30 days prior to the meeting. Members wishing to vote must send their ballots to the independent source/third party with the envelope postmarked at least 10 days prior to the Annual Meeting.

The ballot lists all candidates running for office at the time. As the date for write-ins has passed, the candidates on the ballot are as follows: President: Sam Brewer; 1st Vice President: Al Gregg; 2nd Vice President: Joe Pedigo; 3rd Vice President: Jeanette Rash, Angela Roper; 4th Vice President: Bill Byers, Jeff Roskopf; Treasurer: Mike Holland, Tom Tedford.

## TOW TRAINING

# Leave It Better Than We Found It

*Could mandated certification be in our future?*

By Howard Eagan

To put it frankly, I stole the title to this article. I changed the words a bit, but, yeah, I stole it. I recently read an article in *FireRescue* magazine by John Hinton that dealt with training and one quote caught my eye. He wrote, "Even with all of its history and tradition, today's fire service ain't your daddy's car, and we can't drive it like it is."

Change the subject to towing and recovery and the message is the same. However, education for tow truck drivers is a volatile subject at times. Throw a group of towers in a room, start a discussion on training, then head for the door. Depending on the personalities, it could get ugly.

In my opinion, a standard certification should be required. In other professions, there is a state- and/or federally-mandated curriculum that must be achieved before anyone is certified. The Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) program is an example.

The New Jersey State Department of Health sets guidelines for minimum course requirements that must be achieved to receive a certification as an EMT. An EMT-Basic (B) designation is given to those who successfully complete the newly revised, 120-hour United States Department of Transportation's Emergency Medical Technician-Basic training program. It is valid for



Howard "Scooby" Eagan

a period of not less than 36 nor more than 42 months. The requirement for re-certification as an EMT-Basic is successful completion of approved continuing education units, consisting of 24 core credit hours and 24 elective credit hours.

If you or your loved ones needed the services of an ambulance, I'm pretty sure that you would be glad when someone trained and certified on the latest advances in pre-hospital emergency care showed up.

You might also prefer that the EMT use up-to-date technology like an automated external defibrillator (AED) instead of what his daddy used when he drove an ambulance 50 years ago. By the way, that was a wind-up contraption with a big ball that thumped your chest to jump-start your heart.

If you're having trouble following me, picture this scenario: The rescue squad



pulls up with a hacksaw and a lawnmower blade taped at one end to free you from your wrecked car. It might take a few hours, whereas the latest in state-of-the-art-rescue tools and techniques would enable a well-trained rescuer to free you in minutes. We can also equate this example to the technology available today in modern wreckers.

A lot of you are now probably thinking to yourselves, "We don't need the government to step in and start regulating us as to certification." However, I think most of us can generally agree that there should be some type of standard training requirements for the towing industry and a body to regulate them.

I'm not for the government telling me the requirements for something they know nothing about. I'll even go one step further by saying I'm against some self-important towing association or out-of-touch association leader mandating anything for the industry either, particularly someone not in touch with what happens in the field. Many times, I've heard grumbling in the industry about people who sit in offices and haven't been out in the field in years trying to dictate things for us. I'm not passing judgment on anyone here; I'm just passing along what I've heard.

A visit to the "safety room" on Internet towing sites such as [www.tow411.net](http://www.tow411.net) is a convincing argument for the need of some type of industry-wide certification. The pictures of the unsafe towing acts posted there make it look more like a "disgrace" room.

The hardest sell on this certification-mandate issue will be to experienced wrecker operators who are truly gifted, or naturals, when it comes to towing and recovery. These individuals, some of whom I have met and/or worked with, are ahead of their time in technique, in some cases, more so than some of the towing industry's trainers and so-called leaders. For the most part, their names are not in the museum, they don't write articles in magazines, and they don't have some certification patch on their arm. Some are indeed trainers, but most are merely talented operators.

Even so, it's just a matter of time until we start seeing certain equipment and certification mandates that will be required of us in this profession. Some of you are seeing it happening now in certain parts of the country. We either start now as an industry to do something about it, or I am sure Big Brother will do it for us sooner or later.

For my part, I believe it's going to be sooner than later. Even though I already supply training to both the towing and recovery and rescue professions in air bags/cushions and cross-training, I have been attending some courses lately to prepare. When I was a state extrication instructor, I didn't stop learning; I still traveled and attended various rescue courses throughout the country.

It is all in what you make of it. I have found that some of the courses I have attended were both fun and informative. In fact, I have met some great people from all walks of life and different parts of the world. Yes, the world. I have created some great friendships that, hopefully, will last a lifetime. Most importantly, I have decided to do something, rather than sitting around and waiting. 🚗

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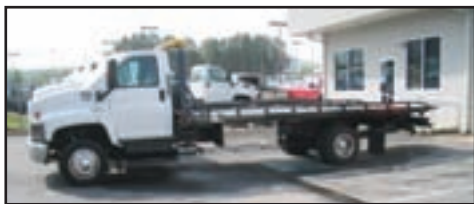
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## TOW TIPS

# Lessons From My Scrapbook

*Revealing that nobody's perfect  
in the towing business*

By Bill Jackson

When my phone rings and a voice at the other end says, "I had an unusual job" or "You'll never believe what I did the other day," I switch my recorder on and listen closely to all the details. Often, I find that there is a host of information from which I can learn more about heavy recovery.

From my files, here are some jobs that I have done and what I learned from each. Even if you have two 60-ton hydraulics, you might still benefit!

### Job One: Bomber Down

This was the first big plane recovery I ever tried. It involved lifting a bomber weighing 80,000 pounds that was flat down in a field (fortunately, no bombs!). I had been told we could do the job on our own as long as nothing metallic was used. I quickly worked out that if I did it with just cushions, it would result in less damage.

Using four of our jumbo cushions, I tried to make a cradle with straps to "cuddle" the airplane belly. I placed the cushions flat on each side of the fuselage and then inflated them until the strap took the strain. Even though the cushions leaned in as the air was pumped in, the plane started to lift at about two psi.

However, from then on, it all went wrong. The plane had two wing-mounted engines and, as it very quickly started to go up and sideways,

I didn't know which way to run. As I was envisioning myself paying – forever – for a new bomber wing plus engine renewal, I was saved from disaster. The loops to which the cushions were attached let go and the bags turned on their sides so the plane was cradled safely.

**Lesson Learned:** If you want to lift a heavy airplane, you had better make sure you secure it from all ends to halt forward and backward movement. Also, use only two cushions for lifting, while keeping two fully inflated to act as safety buffers.

### Job 2: Going Underwater

My first call for an underwater recovery came from a very excited tower who said he had heard we could do underwater recovery. A barge complete with a digger welded to the deck had sunk. Could we please assist him by providing two heavy wreckers to winch the barge ashore?

One of my first rules in recovery is "Never assist anyone on a big job. If it all goes right, your name will never be mentioned in the news. But if it goes wrong, everyone in the country will know that you screwed up! Be the boss or leave!"

Anyway, we arrived on-site with two 50-ton wreckers and could only see a boom sticking out of the water in the pit. I guessed the depth at about 10 feet. However, there was a catch. We could not get any closer than 500 feet as the sides had no real surface.



Using Jumbo air cushions for an aircraft recovery



The owner had a 100-ton barge-mounted crane to do the lifting, but no one knew how many tons of lift was needed to bring up the barge, which weighed about 100 tons. Basically, it was "suck it and see!"

We hooked 200 feet of extra wire cable to each truck and started the pull. Nothing really happened and I did not know what to do.

**Lesson Learned:** Here I learned that with each winch pulling 100,000 pounds on a bare drum (and 22,500 pounds on an overfull drum), I was only getting total pull of 50,000 pounds. Not enough power to do the job.

I thought that the mere fact of lifting the barge off the bottom would have reduced the load on my trucks, but it just didn't work. Book figures do not always tell the true facts, especially when you have unknown factors involved.

After two days of really hard work, it wasn't worth the effort as the salvage value did not cover my costs.

### Job 3: Sinking Digger

This call came in from another pit owner. He said he needed to move a 100,000-pound digger (with engine running) as it was slowly sinking into the gravel and slurry underneath it. I calculated that two trucks, as above, could do it easily as the resistance could not be more than two bare drum pulls of 100,000 pounds total.

Well, guess what? I couldn't move it an inch. As soon as we started to pull, it just stood still. Even with all the blocks I could find, my trucks just pulled back like they were on runners. The surface we stood on was sugar sand, which acts just like water, and no amount of blocks would cure the problem.

The solution was to admit defeat. The owner brought in another digger, dug a hole, and poured in 25 tons of concrete. A week later, he did the recovery job with a 25-ton come-along plus a 200-foot roll of cable and thick wood boards. He winched it out at about one foot a minute onto the boards and drove it away.

**Lesson Learned:** I forgot my own rules and ignored the treacherous ground conditions. This resulted in a new rule for all future jobs: If I could not stand up in the conditions, I should stand back and have another hard think before wasting everyone's time and my valuable trucks.

Now, please remember I am going back to my learning days and looking at some of my failures. By sharing my mistakes, I hope I can save someone out there from the same experience. I know, of course, that no one in our line of business ever walks away from a challenge.

Even so, I will always maintain that if you have never walked away from a job, either you have never met a really big one or you just don't know the basics of common sense. ☞

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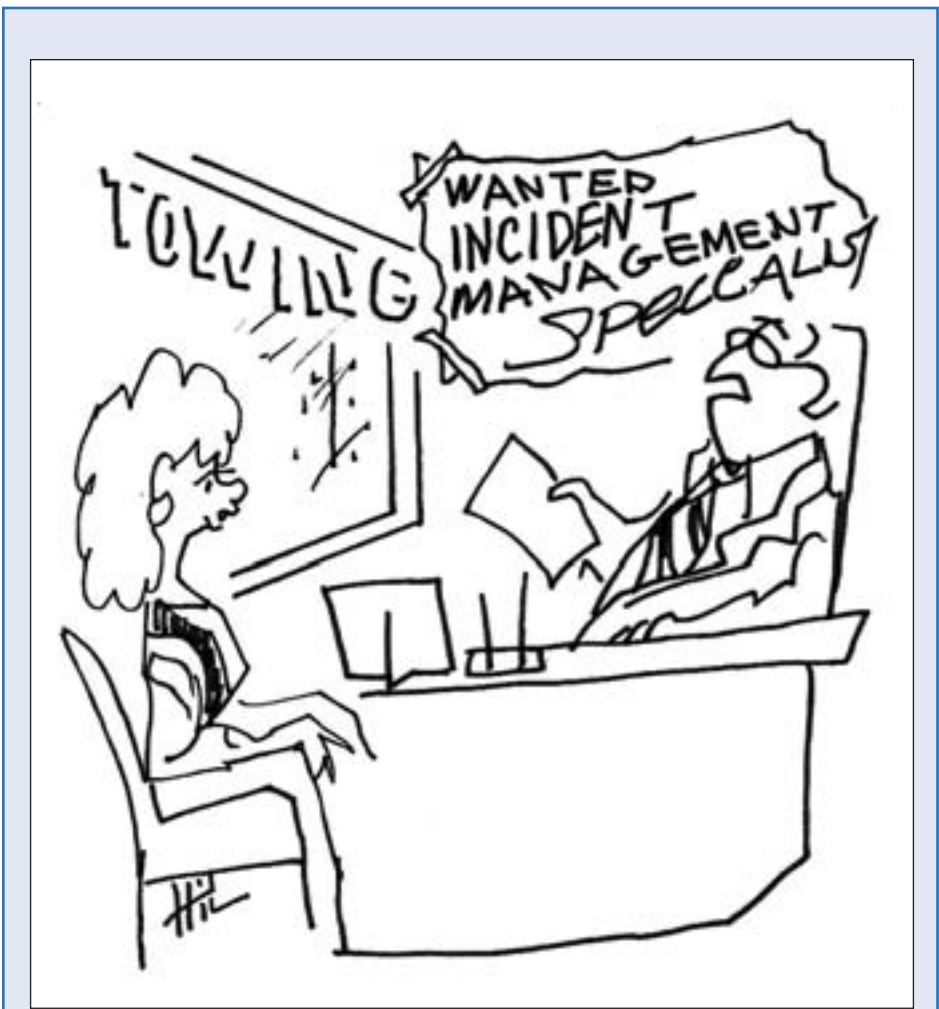
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CENTURY 9055**  
3 STAGE TRI AXLE,  
48" TUNNEL BOX ON  
A 2006 KW T-800  
(ROTATOR SPECS)  
\$\$\$ SAVE BIG  
BUCKS \$\$\$



**CENTURY  
4024/T2**  
ON A 1997 FORD  
L9000



**60 TON CENTURY  
SDU UNDERLIFT**  
ON A 2001  
PETERBILT 379,  
CAT, 18SP.  
LOADED WITH  
EQUIPMENT!  
\*WE WILL DEAL



**50 TON  
CHALLENGER  
SDU/2 UNDER-  
LIFT**  
ON A 2001  
STERLING  
HEAVY SPEC  
CHASSIS  
A GREAT UNIT



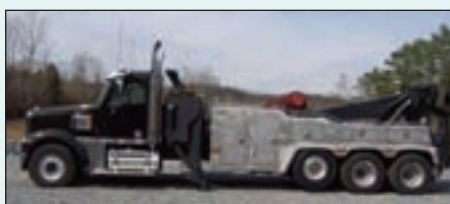
**CENTURY  
9055 (50 TON)**  
ON A 2001  
PETERBILT  
IT WAS  
ORGINIALLY A  
FLORIDA SHOW  
UNIT.



**1999  
PETERBILT  
379 DAYCAB, CAT  
475 HP, 18SP,  
600K MILES WITH  
A 2004 B&B, 25  
TON WRECKER  
BODY**



**1999 FORD F350**  
V-8, AUTO, 16" CUBE VN, START-ALL  
GENERATOR, GAS AIR COMPRESSOR,  
GREAT SHAPE.



**2007 FREIGHTLINER CORANDO**  
HEAVY SPEC, TRI AXLE, WITH A VULCAN V100 50  
TON, 144" UNDERLIFT, SP850 XP SIDEWINDER,  
ALL NEW. READ TO GO. IN PRIME OR PAINTED.  
**WE ARE IMPRESSED!**



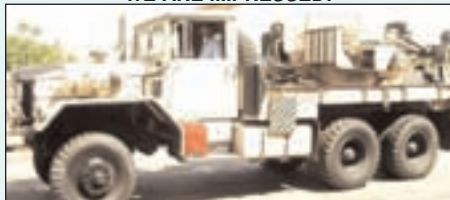
**2005 FORD F450**  
POWERSTROKE, AUTOMATIC, 115K MILES  
WITH A CENTURY 301M AUTOLOAD.  
SUPER CLEAN



**2006 FORD F450**  
POWERSTROKE, AUTO, 2500K MILES WITH A  
JERR-DAN TWINLINE, EXTENDABLE BOOM  
AUTOLOAD. LIKE NEW.



**84 FREIGHTLINER**  
400 CUMMINS, 10SP, CHALLENGER 5802, Z30  
ZACKLIFT. CALL FOR DETAILS.



**1971 AM GENERAL**  
M816.250 CUMMINS, NEW REAR TIRES, OTHER UPDATES,  
ONLY 35K MILES WITH 'ARMY STYLE ROTATOR' EVERY-  
THING WORKS!



**2003 FORD F650**  
CUMMINS 230HP, AUTOMATIC, 190K MILES  
WITH A JERR DAN 21S RR.  
CALL FOR DETAILS



**02 GMC C6500**  
3126 CAT, 6SP, WITH A CENTURY 21S, CALL  
FOR DETAILS.

**Coming Soon!!!**

**"WE ARE EXPANDING TO CENTRAL FLORIDA"**

New location will include

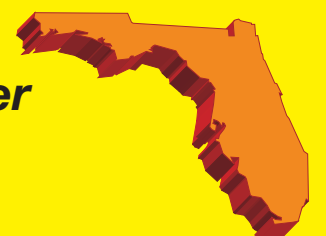
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*Watch for more details soon!*





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